

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Interview #2

Thursday, May 3, 1990

ELSON: Last night I finished a quick review of the first interview, and I found myself meandering, a great deal of poor grammar, but for the most part I sort of enjoyed what I read. Then I realized I didn't know whether you wanted to go about this chronologically or you wanted me to finish telling you briefly about my abortive career, or how did you want to continue?

RITCHIE: I thought it might be good to keep it chronological. So we might want to stay in the 1950s and talk about it. On the other hand, if you would rather just give me an overview and then go back to ask questions, we could do it that way as well, whichever you feel comfortable with.

ELSON: Well, I could do it chronologically, I mean that's the way I think, in those terms. However, I'm afraid I'll be too lengthy if we do it chronologically.

RITCHIE: That's okay, I've got time. There's no reason to condense it in anyway.

ELSON: Well, you can throw out what you don't want. Okay, where do we start?

RITCHIE: You left just as you were about to arrange for an assignation for the president of the United States. You can't leave that one dangling!

ELSON: Then do you want to go back to the '50s? Because I was just moving along hitting highlights as things came to mind. Well, yes, that was at the dinner for Carl Hayden. I don't know whether it was common knowledge, but everyone who was around here sort of knew that Kennedy certainly had an eye for the ladies. There was no question that the arrangement that we made was for a meeting. The Secret Service had problems with it, because the house that we selected was out near Camelback Mountain, as I recall, and it was a beautiful place, you could see from the mountain and all that, but they apparently found it an inappropriate place. I don't know which—I have my suspicions about which lady was there, but I can't prove it, and I really didn't want to know at the time.

Kenny, I think, was the one that asked me to make a special arrangement, other than the suite we had for him at the Westward Ho Hotel, where we had the dinner, in downtown Phoenix. He wanted a place where he could relax and not be cornered in the hotel, in other words. So we found this house for him. I can't remember the exact words that Kenny used, but there was no question in my mind that it had to be a discrete place and a place where there would be a great deal of privacy, and where the president could enjoy himself, and we accommodated and made the appropriate arrangements, and he used it. I don't want to speculate about who it was.

RITCHIE: You talked about the Carroll Arms a number of times last week, about meetings with different people there, and it pops up in everybody's reminiscences. I get the sense that the Carroll Arms was the great relaxation place.

ELSON: Watering hole. Of course, when I first came back here there was only the Old Senate Office Building, now the Russell Building. So the closest bar or eating place was right catercornered or diagonally across the street from the Senate Office Building. The bar and eating place was down the steps. Everyone sort of met there. For instance, that's where Mark Russell got his start over there. He started out playing the piano. Then down the street was the Plaza [hotel], and it wasn't until 1960, I think that the Monocle [restaurant] opened. So there weren't too many decent eating places, or any eating places, certainly a bar, so everyone congregated over there after work. It was a fascinating place in the sense that you saw not only senators there but your staff colleagues, though you might have been fighting with them all day—and that's one of the differences I see in the Senate then and the Senate today—there was a camaraderie, though you could disagree there was a great deal of integrity in your disagreement. There wasn't a lot of dishonesty or lying to you, or misleading you. You fought fair and square for the most part. After you might have lost a legislative battle you'd meet over at the Carroll Arms and have a drink and laugh about it.

As I said, it was just amazing the number of people that went in there. I'm sure it destroyed a lot of marriages and caused problems at home for a lot of people, because

it was almost a ritual that you would go across the street and have a few drinks and talk about the day's activities. I started going there a lot because I discovered I found out a lot over there, just in talking and listening and seeing people. You always had your antenna out for picking up everything. I used to pride myself, or I was accused I might say, and I think there might have been some merit to what they said, but I could pick up weaknesses in people rather easily, and

could remember them. I always put them in the back of my mind for later use, politically, but always in terms of the senator, not for any personal reasons but more for gathering political strength.

So it was a great watering hole for finding out what was going on other than the things you were directly dealing with, because you spent a lot of time in your office, you weren't seeing everyone that day, you weren't always going to the floor. So it was one place where you could pick up on the gossip. It just seemed like it was the place to go and have a drink, and congregate, and associate. I went there practically every night before I went home, and lots of times I never got home. [laughs] I think I mentioned to you that's where I met Cohn and Schine, but lots of senators went over there besides the staff people.

It was also a luncheon place. When I first came back here, I always in the early years used to go down to the cafeteria in the Old Senate Office Building, it's still over there but they have machines there now, for lunch. It would be a quick lunch, practically the same thing every day, a hamburger, a piece of pie or cake and ice cream, a bowl of bean soup, and back to the office. You'd be through eating in fifteen, twenty minutes, and that was sort of silly. After I took over as the senator's Administrative Assistant, then I almost made it a point of meeting people for lunch. I found that getting out of the office I could get a lot of things done—politics, or fund raising, or whatever—by going outside the building rather than going down into the cafeteria. Unfortunately, that also meant a cocktail.

But I found it a very useful thing, and most of the time I went there until the Monocle opened. I know I was one of the first to go into the Monocle, so between the Carroll Arms and the Monocle that's pretty much where I hung out, and occasionally at the Plaza, which was a hotel, which later was the police headquarters, and then they just this past year tore down the building. Those two places was pretty much where I hung out at lunch, and then after work I'd probably stop at the Carroll Arms, come

back to the office because of the time difference between Arizona and Washington, I'd go back and work maybe for another hour, make long-distance phone calls to check on things in Arizona or return people's phone calls, and then I might go back to either the Carroll Arms and have dinner, and then maybe go back to the office, or meet someone late, have another cocktail, and might end up at a place like Anna Maria's—I don't know whether you know that place.

RITCHIE: The only place that would stay open late.

ELSON: Yeah. At two o'clock in the morning and have another meal, spaghetti and sausage and green peppers—I had a prodigious appetite. I don't know where I put it, but I could eat two meals a night and think nothing of it. So maybe I'd get home at two, three o'clock in the morning, and be back in the office by eight at the latest, because the senator was always there early. We would meet first thing in the morning. I was always the first person to see him during the day, and the last person at night. That's when we got our things done, unless he came back at lunchtime, sometimes we'd go downstairs to the cafeteria when he wanted to have lunch. But most of the time I would be going out. But the Carroll Arms was a hub of a lot of activity. If those walls could talk, or the bricks that are scattered all over hell now, I'm sure each one of them could tell a story. In fact, I could tell you some good stories about the Carroll Arms. When I was running [for the Senate] in '64—well, we can get to that, because it was a story about my picking up some money from some Texas interests over there, and it was the first time I ever saw a pornographic movie being made.

RITCHIE: Being made?

ELSON: Over in the Carroll Arms. I thought, "Jesus Christ, all they have to do is swing the camera this direction once and I'm through as a candidate for anything!" I was accidentally there thinking that's where I was supposed to meet this person to pick up the money. Well, it's a long story.

RITCHIE: I was going to ask you if this was a lobbyists' hangout as well?

ELSON: Oh, yeah. Lobbyists went there mainly because there wasn't very much else around here. You had the old Dodge Hotel, and some of those places, but

there was nothing really very decent around here, and that was so convenient, because if you had to get back in a hurry you could just walk across the street. It was more because of its location, you could fall in the place. A lot of senators fell in and out of there too. But that was also the place where one of Carl Hayden's Administrative Assistants committed suicide over there, so it had a lot of history. I was really sorry to see them tear the place down. I spent time there when I was traveling back and forth, when I'd move my family to Arizona I'd stay over there, particularly when I was running, mainly because it was so close and convenient. Although it wasn't the greatest hotel in the world, it certainly was interesting. Just a fascinating place. I think if you talk to anyone who was around here during the '50s, '60s and even the '70s up until the Senate took it over, they all have stories to tell about the Carroll Arms and what happened there. A lot of assignments, and just a lot of activity.

RITCHIE: It seems like sort of an off-limits place that was right next door.

ELSON: Yeah, you didn't see many outsiders. There weren't that many tourists staying there, though there were some. But it was mainly Hill people, they overwhelmed it. They had a great lady there who was a waitress, who didn't take crap from anyone. Her name was Flo Black, she was really something else. She came from Alabama, I think, and had a southern accent, cute and well-built, but she wouldn't take anything and her language left something to be desired. It was rather colorful. She'd tell senators to go kiss her, you know, wherever. [laughs] If you ordered a Coke, she'd say, "This is no drugstore, we only serve drinks here." She was something else. They had some interesting waitresses there. Well, just everyone, lobbyists, members and staff people, you could have conversations going on all over that place, plots and counterplots.

It was a wonderful institution and it was a great place, and I'm sure it must have been in the years before I arrived here. I don't know what it was like during the war, I don't recall hearing too much about it, other than it was a watering hole and hotel. A lot of members, when they first got elected, would stay over there. I remember Senator [Alan] Cranston, when he first came back he stayed over there for a while until his family moved back. A number of them would live there. I'm trying to think, there were a couple of members who did live there on a more or less permanent basis, I'm

trying to recall who they were. I believe George Aiken was one of them. But it was a wonderful place, and I miss it.

RITCHIE: Was Kennedy a regular over there when he was a senator?

ELSON: He would come over but I wouldn't call him a regular. I would see his brother over there. There were always a lot of poker games going on over there, some pretty high stakes games. Denny Chavez, for instance, from New Mexico, he was a regular over there. Dennis had a problem with the bottle and I know one night I took him home because I came out of there and he was hanging onto the lamppost. He was a wonderful old guy, and loved Carl Hayden, but he spent a lot of time there. And of course Joe McCarthy spent a lot of time over there. I think everyone spent a lot of time over there, except those that didn't drink, or went home like they should have to their families. But it was such a political place that you almost felt as though you were missing some valuable information if you didn't at least stop in for one drink, or meet someone there, because it was a good listening spot, and it was addictive.

RITCHIE: Did newspaper reporters hang out there as well?

ELSON: Some.

RITCHIE: They never wrote about it.

ELSON: I know, but everyone was always a little leery of reporters. They knew who they were. All the press secretaries around here would hang out over there. There was something about the press corps, they could always consume a lot of alcohol. But you would always be very careful around there, and you knew who they were. There were some, but not many as I recall, and if they were, we sort talked on the frivolous, or about women and sex and things like that.

RITCHIE: But the press in those days really left politicians' private lives private.

ELSON: Oh, yeah, it was not that they didn't know, they just respected the privacy of senators' lives and knew that they were unwinding the way they could. Unless they really got out of hand, or were so open and notorious that they couldn't

avoid it, most of them would ignore what they knew. You know, there are no secrets in this town, as you must know. Sooner or later, someone knows and it's going to come out. There's so many leaks to the press, and some are better than others in leaking it. Members were good at it. Some cultivated the press. A lot of it changed as I think I mentioned before, where I saw the big change was in the class of 1958. Those nineteen new senators, thirteen Democrats and six Republicans as I recall.

Television became national, and they were the first generation of media buffs and they started playing to the galleries, to the press people. And of course they wanted to change some of the rules of the Senate. Under Lyndon Johnson's leadership we did change, particularly in the Democratic caucus, where a new member would get a major committee assignment, where prior to that they started out with a minor committee, the District of Columbia and others, but now gave them a major committee assignment as soon as they arrived in the Senate. They all got on good committees, but I noticed this was a class that knew how to use the media, and had used it in their election campaigns, and was really I think probably the first television class. Then it got worse as time went on. Now today, my God, it seems like television is running the world, and the journalists are running the world.

There are all sorts of stories about Carl Hayden and the press. Carl Hayden would talk to any reporter, but I would always be amazed that nothing ever appeared in print or on the news, because he refused to get into speculation of which might happen or what was going to happen. He would tell them what had happened, but they would always ask, "What do you think is going to happen?" He would say, "Look, there's a hundred members up here, they're all individuals, and I'll not speculate on what they're going to do. If you're reporting the news, this is what you're supposed to be doing." Of course, there's that old story about him calling the *New York Times* reporter down from the gallery. The guy thought maybe he was going to get a big interview or a red hot story, I forget what his name was.

RITCHIE: Was that William S. White?

ELSON: Might have been someone like that, but I can't recall right off hand. But he came racing down and all the senator wanted to do was [expletive] about not getting

his *New York Times*, or the subscription not being delivered to the Methodist Building. [laughs] I was amazed at that.

As I say, with that class that came in '58, and with the advent of television and jet service and all that, this was a different breed of cat that came into the Senate.

ITCHIE: You mentioned earlier about the introduction of jet airline service, people went home on weekends, and constituents came here more often. I get the sense that there was more socializing in the 1950s because people were here for longer stretches.

ELSON: Yes. Well, I always felt sorry for the senators and the congressmen who lived close by, because they were used to a constituent coming into the office unannounced, so their operations were entirely different than anyone west of the Mississippi, because getting back here was an all-day trip by plane when it was prop. When did jet service really start? Was it '57 or '58? Somewhere in there. I think National started it from New York to Miami. Starting with that, it was gradual. It didn't happen overnight that things changed.

But the reason I noticed it so much in 1961, after Kennedy was elected—I'm sure you're aware but that was the first time there had been a change from a Republican administration to a Democratic administration since 1933. So all the old New Dealers that were still around and in places they wanted their jobs back and they wanted to get back into positions, and a lot of them were still relatively young men and women. I remember that first year, my God, I remember getting ready to go back to Arizona on a trip and I had so many job files on my desk—I must have had four or five hundred—that I couldn't even see over the top of the desk, they were piled so high. I remember it took me that entire weekend just to dictate acknowledgments and answers before I could even leave town. You were just inundated with all this stuff.

It seems like it was that time when the lobbyists started getting better organized, in the late '50s, early '60s period, so combining that with the better transportation and the change in the media, it started to change the way you operated around here. We were forced to make changes and not do things quite the way we did, because we just couldn't keep up. I remember on two pieces of mail, one involved some railroad

legislation, an interstate commerce type thing, and there was one other issue, there were two that came out that you could tell—you could always spot lobbying correspondence, because it all said the same thing, they were all postcards—you could always spot those. They were the easiest thing in the world to spot. And we'd reply in kind for the most part. But I think in one month's time, from where our average correspondence might have been seven or eight hundred letters a week from home, this one month I think we received forty thousand pieces of mail from the state of Arizona. Well, with a staff of seven, and only four secretaries, and we didn't use robotypes and all those other things, we finally had to get staff from the Rules Committee and the Appropriations Committee, because the senator still insisted that every piece of mail be answered. We did but that took a little while and we couldn't live up to his twenty-four-hour response time. But those sort of changes started. For those west of the Mississippi, and I think every office experienced this sort of change.

Before that there was this camaraderie, closeness, and you had more time to visit, and think things out. You did have some time to think, you weren't always responding. And then that all changed in the early '60s. Of course there was a Democratic administration then, which changed a lot of things as far as our work was concerned. I pin the beginning of those changes to that '58 class that came in '59, of shaking up the place a little, not necessarily waiting to be heard, and building up their seniority, and following the traditions that were pretty strongly entrenched in many ways. You always had the mavericks, of course. One of my favorites was Bill Langer, whose offices were down the hall when he was around. He was wonderful.

RITCHIE: In what way?

ELSON: Oh, his background, everything about him. He was tall, and I thought a handsome man. He loved women, in fact all of his staff members were women, except for the guy who opened the mail and drove him. He had a great eye for the ladies, and they were all coming out of that Dakota country, and they were all attractive. But he was a maverick. He was one that you couldn't predict anything he was going to do. He and the senator, I know, got along real well.

When I look back—I was thinking last night about our meeting today, and I thought, boy, I've been a lucky son of a gun to have been around at this time in American

history, going back to being a Depression baby, going through that, being on the fringes of World War II, having brothers in there, but I was too young to be in the service, and then being here during the '50s, which was a fascinating period of time, and then during the '60s and all the Civil Rights stuff, and the H-bomb, and the Cold War, up through today, and still only being fifty-nine. I feel like I've had a really exciting, wonderful life, and I'm just glad I was around to see some of that. But then I'm brought to earth when I think about Carl Hayden's career, that I always like to point out covered seeing Geronimo's signal fires as a little boy out in the territory, to watching the first man land on the moon. Now that's a lot of American history. When you think about it, he had been elected to public office for a total of sixty-seven consecutive years, when you count his territorial days and his congressional service and Senate service. That's almost a quarter of the nation's history. Then you go back to his father, and that's about half the nation's history. So that brings me back to earth.

But the rapidity of the changes that took place starting with World War II and the acceleration of the pace of change just boggles the mind. The amount of information that's available today at your fingertips, I just think it's wonderful. I just regret that I don't have a mind big enough to assimilate it all. I don't see how anyone can be bored, is what I guess I'm driving at, with everything that has gone on, and is going on now. It's just a fascinating time to be alive.

RITCHIE: Well, you touched on a lot of major historical events, because you came here first during McCarthyism, and were here during a time when three future presidents of the United States were all training in the Senate as presiding officer, and majority leader, and backbencher, and a few members of the House who were also destined for the presidency.

ELSON: An interesting thing—did you see that article in the paper about the professor who kept that interview with LBJ?

RITCHIE: Oh, William Leuchtenburg. ["A Visit With LBJ," *American Heritage* (May/June 1990).]

ELSON: In that article he mentioned a guy by the name of Hayes Redmond, who was an assistant to Bill Moyers at the White House. Well, Hayes—we called him

Woody—I first met him when I was fighting in Korea, as I told you, so valiantly over in Germany and France. He was an Annapolis graduate, brighter than hell, came over and he was going to be my assistant adjutant. That's when I first met him, back in 1954, I guess. He had a tragic ending to his life. After he left the White House he went to work with Mr. Land at Polaroid-Land, as his number one executive. Woody, through whatever reasons—and I'd been in his wedding when he got married in New York—anyhow, he ended up committing suicide. He'd had to be institutionalized for a while for deep depression. I remember my last conversation shortly before he blew his brains out. I asked him, "What's depression like?" He said, "Roy, I don't think you have any comprehension what a real depression is. It's so deep, it's like a dark whirlpool that just sucks you down deeper and deeper and there's no hope."

Anyhow, the only reason I mention that article is that I sort of agree with what Lyndon was saying about Jack Kennedy, because he was really not very much interested in being a United States senator. Everyone knew that he was using the position as a stepping stone to run for the presidency of the United States. It was just a matter of when. He was just an extremely delightful human being, and could have been a good senator if he wanted to. Now, Ted of course has really become a very fine senator, but even his brother Bobby worked a little harder at it, but you also knew what he was doing. When you jump and all of a sudden become a citizen of the state of New York to run, that's nice and convenient. So I agreed with that. I don't know if any of Kennedy's people should take that critically. It would amaze me a little bit, but I'm sure some of them will. I'd like to read that interview with Lyndon sometime. I think that would be fascinating, particularly some of the things he said about Roosevelt. I never heard him say anything like that. Well, that was a digression! [laughs]

RITCHIE: I was going to ask you again about the earliest years you were here, back in '52. You mentioned the pall of McCarthyism that spread over the Senate. Can you tell me anything about Hayden's relations with McCarthy, what Hayden thought about McCarthy?

ELSON: Well, he thought he was a dangerous man. Carl Hayden, after McCarthy made that speech in Wheeling, West Virginia in 1950, I know when I got

back here, they already had underway an investigation by the Rules Committee into McCarthy. Carl Hayden was the one that initiated the mail cover.

RITCHIE: On McCarthy?

ELSON: On McCarthy. On the Greek ships, and on some of his investments in the market, and things like that. In fact, Carl Hayden went to Harry Truman to get two people he wanted. He wanted T. Coleman Andrews—you remember that name?—who was head of the IRS, a very arch conservative from Virginia was head of the Internal Revenue Service, or whatever it was called at the time. To get this one super accountant-investigator from the IRS he had to go to Truman to get him, to come up and work on the Rules Committee with another man by the name of Paul Cotter, who was around here for a long time later on the Appropriations Committee. The senator sort of kept him up here. They were the ones who did a lot of the work, and then there were, I think, two other investigators. This was before I arrived, but they were already investigating McCarthy. Was it [Robert C.] Hendrickson from New Jersey? There were a whole bunch on the Rules Committee who were concerned about what McCarthy was doing to the Senate in its image and just the respect for the Senate. Carl Hayden thought he was sort of a wild man out of control. He also knew that he spent a lot of time at the Carroll Arms and drank heavily. Of course, they had to eventually peel him off the walls out at Bethesda Naval Hospital.

I still remember to this day that soon after I got back here, and right after Eisenhower had been inaugurated, this would probably be in February, taking down to the Department of Justice and the White House something like seventeen or twenty boxes of documents involving this investigation. I don't know what was in them, because they were all sealed, but I was sort of the delivery boy. I think there were two of us that took the stuff down and delivered it. I always thought that the Eisenhower administration would take some action, because we did discover that there was a lot of questionable activities about Senator McCarthy's financial activities. But nothing ever came of all that, and I think Carl Hayden was very disappointed. At this very same time when this was going on, McCarthy attacked George Marshall as being practically a Communist and un-American, was selling us out, and Eisenhower—and Marshall made Eisenhower—but he didn't defend him.

Carl Hayden was very disappointed with him, one of the few criticisms I heard him make of Eisenhower, because Carl Hayden thought that George Marshall was probably the greatest man he had met this century, and went on and raved about how prior to World War II he would come up before the Appropriations Committee, not like they come now with twenty thousand aides and brief cases and computer print-outs and all this. He'd come up all by himself, just General Marshall, with maybe one colonel, and could tell the committee in these secret sessions of the Appropriations Committee getting ready for World War II, where everything was in the pipeline. Apparently he had such an incredible mind that he knew the geopolitical history of every country in the world, what was going on in the world, and then down to where munitions were, like shells for an M-1 or a Springfield .03, in the pipeline, how much, and when it was due there, and all these things. He thought it was just incredible, it was just the greatest display, and he thought he was such a man of integrity and honesty and such a huge public servant, he thought he was one of the great men of this century anywhere in the world, and he made that comment often.

So when McCarthy was around it was disturbing to the senator. But I would say that Carl Hayden had as much to do as anyone with the start of Joe McCarthy's downfall. Of course, my own feelings about him—see by the time I got back Joe McCarthy had been censured. He was censured in '54.

RITCHIE: In December '54.

ELSON: Yeah, later '54, and I didn't get back until June of '55 from my military service, but I had been keeping up with it. My feeling in talking and coming back, and being here before it all happened, was that everyone particularly in the press pats themselves on the back, saying they brought down Joe McCarthy and his threat. Well, it was the United States Senate internally that really brought down Joe McCarthy, and there's no doubt in my mind. The hearings helped, the confrontation and all that, but McCarthy brought that on himself. I don't think it was Edward R. Murrow and his things. It was the United States Senate, because the Senate when someone got out of hand they pretty much isolated him. And the worst thing you could do to a member, and still is I think, is censure them. When your colleagues turn on you, man it is not a pleasant place to be. It destroyed [Thomas] Dodd. I think if anything killed him it was censure more than anything else, and certainly with McCarthy. Then he started

hitting the bottle very, very heavily. Of course, Joe McCarthy was very close to the Kennedys, and especially Bob.

RITCHIE: Who worked for him.

ELSON: Yeah, though he was on the minority staff. But they used to meet over at his house, because McCarthy lived up here on the Hill, to drink together. I think Bob Kennedy at that time was certainly not a liberal, he was more like a fascist than he was a liberal. That all came later, when that was the direction to go. But you can understand that when you look back through Old Man Kennedy and all the other things in their relationship, the Catholicism and everything else, and understanding power.

As I said, I was young, and when I came back here in December of '52 I had just turned twenty-two and it was a very frightening, dark time in American history. I can't believe that one man could exploit the fears and the frustrations of the Cold War the way he did and get away with it. No one called him down on it at first, these wild accusations. But you had the Rosenbergs all during that time, and then you had our Beria—you remember who Beria was, don't you?

RITCHIE: Lavrenti Beria. . . .

ELSON: Who was head of the KGB, yeah. And we had our own in the form of J. Edgar [Hoover]. Now, that's another interesting story about J. Edgar, because I was in the best of all worlds from that standpoint. Carl Hayden always had a close relationship with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, mainly because back in 1927, when Hoover was really just a clerk down there, he talked to the senator, and the senator was the one that got the money to start the identification bureau, or the fingerprint bureau and all that. So from that time they were very close friends. Because when Carl Hayden was sheriff they were using the Bertillon system and phrenology and all sorts of things for identification. So from that time on, Hoover could get from the Appropriations Committee about anything he wanted. One of the reasons Carl Hayden got on the Appropriations Committee was because he had appropriating experience on the House side, because there the legislative committees were also the appropriating committees, before they changed all that.

When I came back here, I had an interesting relationship with the FBI because one of my brothers was an agent with the FBI, and later during the '60s was agent in charge in Nevada, and at one time knew more about organized crime than any single individual in the country. In the meantime, Hoover also was an elder in my other brother's church, the National Presbyterian Church. So between the combination I really thought I was pretty much invisible and could get away with most anything, and I was amazed that I could get from the Bureau about anything I wanted on anyone, even raw files, information. For instance, I could check out really quickly people I wanted to hire or anything like that. I had tremendous access. And I didn't think—being always suspicious from my own education, or just not liking governments particularly, and particularly secrets in government, this always bothered me that someone like myself, even though I was working for a very powerful man, that I had access to such material as easily as I did.

I remember that one of the assistant directors tried to get me to do something that I didn't want to do, and told me about some things they had on me, about some of my extracurricular activities. I said, "Well, do you want to go and talk to the senator about it now, and tell him? Because whatever you have"—and he sort of hinted what it was—I said, "I hope you will give me a couple of sets of photos because I'd like to show them to my wife before she finds them out!" Anyhow, despite this close relationship that the senator had with the Bureau, as well as having a brother in it—and I could tell you lots of stories about that—and Hoover being an elder in my brother's church, I still never trusted the [expletive].

But, I can also say that when I ran for the United States Senate, I am the only person that I know of that J. Edgar Hoover actually endorsed. I mean, wrote a letter. Now, I don't know whether that helped me very much, but it should have. That was mainly because of Carl Hayden. But he did write a letter endorsing me—you couldn't interpret the way it was written any other way than was an endorsement of my candidacy.

RITCHIE: Was that '64?

ELSON: I think that was '68. I don't think we had time to get that done in '64, because when I got in '64 it was late and too many things were happening, so it was

more in '68, which really didn't matter much. But I still have the letter somewhere. Now I've forgotten how we got on. . . .

RITCHIE: We were talking about McCarthyism.

ELSON: We were talking about McCarthyism, yeah. And of course McCarthy was close to the Bureau and J. Edgar, and J. Edgar fed him junk because of this great anti-Communism crusade. I think more sins were committed in the name of democracy and the fear of Communism. You always find governments going right when that happens, rather than ever succumbing to the threat of internal subversion. But it had its effect, the loyalty oaths, all those things, there was a big fight over loyalty oaths at the time. But there was some great debate on those issues too. You had some big men around here too that stood up to some of those things. All in all it was and still is my opinion that it was the United States Senate, the senators themselves that finally brought Joe McCarthy to his knees.

RITCHIE: You mentioned the last time that you used to see Cohn and Schine over at the Carroll Arms.

ELSON: Yeah, quite often. Oh, and then I started to tell you about a story later. As I mentioned to you the last time, Roy Cohn really scared the hell out of me. I mean, he was bright. You just knew that anything was fair from his standpoint. He didn't mind ruining a reputation or a person. He was just a frightening individual. So this would be not too long ago, five or six years ago. [George] Steinbrenner had put on a fundraiser for Peter Rodino at Yankee Stadium. We all went to the game, and sat in Steinbrenner's box, and used his office before and afterwards. They had a dinner reception before the game for this fundraiser. I was there with a whole lot of people. They had all the old-timers from the Yankees, Yogi Berra, [Mickey] Mantle, it was a hell of an affair.

But into this reception comes Roy Cohn. This has to be 1985, '84 or '85, somewhere in there. He comes in and I couldn't believe that he was arriving at this fundraiser for Rodino, but he was there. I had a couple of drinks and finally I went over. He was sort of getting an hors d'oeuvre, and he was alone at that moment, so I went over. I said, "Roy, I'm Roy. I don't know whether you remember me, but we used

to drink way back in the '50s at the Carroll Arms." And I told him I had been with Carl Hayden. He said, "Oh, yeah, I remember. God, weren't those great times!" I said, "Yes they were." I said, "I just wanted to tell you one thing. I thought you were a [expletive] then and my opinion hasn't changed." And he just laughed! It was like water off a duck's back. [laughs] He just laughed and someone else came up then and we just kept on talking. You couldn't insult him. But I had been wanting to say that to him ever since he left here, and I finally got my chance—but it didn't matter.

Then of course he denied he was gay. I had even heard stories back then that he was. Well, anyhow, he died of AIDS, which is sad. But he was some sort of character, in the sense of ruthlessness and brilliance.

RITCHIE: Did you ever have the sense that he was what drove McCarthy at that stage?

ELSON: Oh, there was no question in my mind that he was using McCarthy as much as McCarthy was using him, in fact, more so. He was really the brains behind the whole thing. He was taking it in a certain direction. I never had any doubt about that. McCarthy wasn't that swift, just sort of a nice guy that told good stories, liked to drink, and was really pleasant to be around. So I never had any doubt even then that Cohn was the brains behind McCarthy. And then you wondered who was behind that. You know, you wondered what the agenda of the right was. Of course, you had the Hiss case in '48, and then there was the Lattimore thing, and all the other stuff going on, then Nixon with his race in 1950. So there was this beginning of the Republican party going right. You always wondered who was really behind the Cohn and McCarthy thing. But it certainly scared everyone. I think if you talk to a lot of people who were around here they would have the same reaction.

I know the other people who worked on that investigation, they were those two women that I told you about, Grace Johnson and Mary Frances Halloway. They were up in the Rules Committee, of course Darrell St. Claire was up there in the Rules Committee too, but the two chief investigators were Paul Cotter and Harvey Fosner from the Internal Revenue Service. T. Coleman Anderson was head of it, and I know that the senator went to Truman to get that one, because he apparently was really good. I met him a number of times, and he looked the part. He almost had implanted

in his head a green visor, you know. [laughs] But God he was good! They did some yeoman work that staff doing the background stuff. And there were a number of senators who stood up on the floor, and I personally think some of that was orchestrated behind the scenes, of who would take the lead. I can't really say for sure, but I certainly get the impression from some remarks that the senator made that when Mrs. [Margaret Chase] Smith and some of the others stood up along the line—because a lot of it started out on the Republican side, and there were some good members on the Rules Committee and other Republicans who were very much concerned about what Joe McCarthy was doing to the Senate and knew that some way, somehow they had to put him in his place.

RITCHIE: On the other hand, apparently there were a lot of senators who were afraid of him.

ELSON: That's exactly right, who were scared to take a stand. But this is where I always marveled at Carl Hayden because he was so good behind the scenes. He could size up people, knew how far they would go with something, and keep his mouth shut. You never knew for sure unless he wanted you to know, but I know just damn well there were a lot of things that took place behind the scenes. You've got to remember that the Republicans took over the Congress in 1953, so that switched and you had [William] Knowland as the majority leader, and of course Ernest McFarland had lost to [Barry] Goldwater that election of '52, and he had been majority leader and had gotten clobbered for not spending enough time at home, and with Truman, and the unpopular Korean war, and being soft on Communism.

Of course in Arizona, getting back to McFarland, we had three or five of the founders of the John Birch Society in Arizona, and the John Birch Society was starting to become a thing to reckon with starting about that time. I think they probably reached their peak about 1962 or the early '60s of their influence. Talk about a wonderfully revised view of history! They were very good at it, and very clever. But we had a supreme court justice, a professor still at Arizona State University, an old Arizonan by the name of Brophy, they were three founding members of the John Birch Society. But the whole climate at that time was frightening. As I mentioned, Eisenhower not calling McCarthy down and defending George Marshall was a very disappointing thing. You can say a lot of things about Eisenhower, but that's one that

I would be critical of. Most people who knew anything about George Marshall felt that he let the man down that really made him, gave him all the opportunities and selected him from those '39 military maneuvers down in Louisiana. You know Eisenhower jumped over everyone, and Marshall also selected [Douglas] MacArthur for the Pacific. But a lot of that came out of those maneuvers that they started down in 1939 in Louisiana in the swamps.

RITCHIE: You mentioned the other day that you once caught Grace Johnson in Hayden's office when you came in one morning, or on a Saturday I guess it was.

ELSON: Actually, it was a Sunday.

RITCHIE: Sunday. Did you get the sense that there was that sort of spying going on in the Senate?

ELSON: Well, because she had been on the Rules Committee and things were a lot looser then than they are today by far, it turns out she kept the keys when she was fired. She had kept the Rules Committee passkeys to every damn office in the building. They didn't realize it, they didn't take the security precautions probably that they should have, but she had been fired by the senator, as I think I related to you, I don't see it in the transcript.

RITCHIE: We didn't talk about that on the tape.

ELSON: We didn't get into that. She had been fired by Carl Hayden for a trip that she made, that Grace Johnson and Mary Frances Halloway made, supposedly looking into the USIA's activities. Anyhow, these were two ladies who were really an embarrassment. We kept getting these reports from the State Department and the USIA about what havoc they were wreaking. They were like the "Ugly American" only two female ones who were hot to trot. Just horrible reports we would get back, but they had strong connections because they were close to some very powerful senior members in the Senate both on the Republican and Democratic side, mainly Democratic. Both of them had a drinking problem, but they were both smarter than hell. Like Roy Cohn, they scared the hell out of me.

They lived together out in northwest, and I remember once going to borrow something from Grace. This was way back in the '50s, it was much later that the other thing took place, where she got into the office. But when I first met Grace Johnson and Mary Frances they were on the Rules Committee at that time. It was the first time that I thought that I might get raped by two ladies. Man was I eager to get out of there! I think I told you, but not on the record, that Grace Johnson was probably a very, very attractive woman when she was young, but she looked very hard. She had a huge bust, but she had these skinny little spindly legs. She reminded you of sort of a hen, or what the cartoons that Herblock used to do of the DAR with their ribbons. But she must have been a very attractive lady in her younger days. Mary Frances married later, one of McCarthy's people, I'll have to refresh my memory, but I'm getting off the subject.

They made this trip, and Joe Stewart, who is now the Secretary of the Senate, was assigned because he was over on the floor, to go along to sort of carry their bags on the trip. I think the senator must have said something to him, that he wanted Joe to report back to him, or maybe he didn't, but I know that the senator warned Grace Johnson because he had all these other reports from their trips. [Allen] Ellender was sort of the one that was after the USIA and had sent them on these investigative trips. But the senator warned them before they ever left that if he had any further reports about their drinking or doing what they did best—there were some very wild stories about what they did in Bangkok and what they did in Iceland, running around propositioning people, . . . just all sorts of delightful things. They had great sexual appetites. Maybe that's the more polite way of putting it.

Anyhow, Carl Hayden had warned them that if he had any more reports they were through and there was no coming back. Well, when they came back, we had the reports. This was when they were in Keflavik, I don't know whether they had gone around the world on that trip or not, that we had some really wonderful, delightful, sensational reports about what they did on this trip. I remember the senator calling Joe in and asking him, since I was outside the room and I could hear the conversation, and Joe told him the truth, and confirmed the reports pretty much. The senators who were supporting Grace and Mary Frances, and Grace and Mary Frances themselves, were denying it and saying that the State Department was out to get them because they

were too tough on their investigation. Well, that was total [expletive]. And the senator fired them right then and there.

There had been a report in *Time* magazine about this, not a big article, but a couple of columns, about these escapades. Anyhow, they were fired. After that there were attempts by Grace and Mary Frances to get back on the payroll. They filed a lawsuit against *Time* for libel and defamation of character and all that. They wanted to be vindicated by being put back on the committee and that they were not fired for these reason, mainly to help their lawsuit, but also to get back at the USIA I'm sure. But the senator would not do it. I can't tell you how many senior members, leadership, Lyndon, Mike Mansfield, Allen Ellender particular, supported them. Allen Ellender almost begged the senator on his knees. I again overheard this conversation. I remember the senator saying, "Allen, you know and I know what happened. I warned them, not only once but twice, and I'm just not going to do it. I refuse to do it." He was saying, "But Carl, we've been friends for years, please, I beg you to do this." And the senator said, "Allen, I can't. Now you're the chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, and if you want to put them on your committee, that's certainly on your prerogative, but they'll never go back on the Appropriations Committee." It was a pathetic, sad conversation.

It was begging for both of them, but mainly for Grace Johnson because I know for a fact that Ellender, who for a little guy was well-endowed, really was pleading for Grace Johnson. They had this long relationship. Of course, Ellender was a bachelor, but she must have been something special because she certainly had him—either that or she had enough information that would have been embarrassing to these senior senators, the leadership on both sides of the aisle, that came to try to defend both of them. But that was an internal thing, there was very little publicity about it. But they were an episode.

The general counsel for the USIA at the time, I remember we used to have lots of conversations about it. He was very good. He's still here with the law firm of Cohen and Marks, a guy by the name of Dick Schmidt, who is a very fine attorney. Today we laugh about some of the stuff. I think I mentioned to you that one of the regrets I have was when Carl Hayden left the Senate and retired, the last night before we closed down the office and walked out, I was burning what stuff remained in the safe that we had,

and the last documents that we had were all these reports that we had gotten from various overseas posts about the behavior of these two ladies. I regret to this day that I didn't keep those, because I could have written a beautiful novel. I don't know whether anyone would have believed it, it was so—unusual. And again, they learned their trade well, knowing how to intimidate people, put them in embarrassing positions. That goes back again I think to the McCarthy era, because this would have been in the '60s then.

Getting back to answer your question, Grace Johnson hated my guts after a number of things. She used to try to see the senator and sometimes I'd let her and sometimes I wouldn't. I think she knew that I—well, between Tom Scott who was the clerk of the Appropriations Committee and others, the senator was really mad because we didn't tell him early enough, and was mad at a number of staff people because we had earlier reports about their activities and we didn't bring them to his attention right away, and could have avoided maybe the second trip, there were a couple of trips. But Grace didn't care much for me after that. So later, this would be in the '60s, after Kennedy was assassinated and Johnson was president, was when I caught her coming into the senator's office. I'm a little vague on these dates.

I couldn't believe she was there, and she ran out the door when I said, "my God!" And she was over near the safe, and fortunately it was locked. I think she was trying old codes that she might have had from being on the Rules Committee. She knew that we had all these reports that the senator had been receiving. Well, she ran out of the office, and when I finally looked around to see if the senator was there, or anyone else was in the office, then I called down to police at the Delaware and C [Street] entrance and said, "If you see Grace Johnson, stop her, because she was in this office illegally." He said, "Well, she just left." I reported it to the senator and we checked everything and it was all there. I don't know, she disappeared, she left town, because we tried to reach her. But immediately the senator had the Rules Committee change all the locks in the entire Senate Office Building, and in the Capitol, any Senate office.

It was months and months, it might even have been a year later, I was getting out of the elevator and there was this mob of constituents, I mean people who were obviously from out of town and visiting, and there was Grace. She had either fallen down or had an operation on her hip and she was using a cane. I came out of there,

and I said, "Well, hello Grace, where have you been?" And she picks up this cane, "You [expletive]! I'm going to kill you!" And she started waving this and these people were all scattering. I said, "Maybe I'd better call the police again." She said, "You [expletive] . . ." oh and the language she used! It went on and she called me all sorts of things. I just sort of laughed. These people were just scattering all over the place because they didn't know what the hell was going to happen. Finally, I said, "Grace maybe we'd better have a talk with the police," and then she went running again and disappeared again. She was something. Both of those women are dead now. They certainly behind the scenes had some very powerful people either frightened, or they were good at something else. But they were very bright, both of them. And at one time they had done some very good work—I meant, for the Senate [laughs] and not on their backs, I mean really good work.

RITCHIE: In a sense you've described the case of Roy Cohn and the case of Grace Johnson, as staff members who. . .

ELSON: Wielded tremendous power.

RITCHIE: And got away with things in the name of the senators and the committees that they worked for.

ELSON: Yeah, and mainly because the members—see, where the Senate's always gotten into trouble, I think, is that the members themselves haven't clamped down or they have let someone get away with something. Either they didn't know about it, or they had an excuse, or whatever. Of course, I think this is what happened in Bobby Baker's situation, that they weren't watching what other things they were doing.

In those days you've got to remember that Senate staff people, for instance, if my name ever showed up in a newspaper, you know, you could get fired for something like that. It was always in the senator's name. Any calls that you made, you're calling for Senator Hayden, and a lot of people became very skilled at that and didn't bother to tell the senator, didn't let him know what was happening. So a lot of staff people caused their sponsors and members of the United States Senate some problems. It was really the senators' responsibility to keep a tighter reign not only on their personal staffs but on their committee staffs. A lot of the problems that eventually came out,

particularly of staff members getting power, was because they weren't watched closely enough in the sense of their extracurricular activities. I don't think that's changed a hell of a lot. In fact, it's gotten worse in many ways, but back then it was rare for a staff member to get a lot of publicity. You didn't make policy statements, you didn't speak out. In fact, if your name appeared, as I said, you weren't doing your job right. Now, if you got your boss' name in the paper the right way, or on a news broadcast, that was fine, but yours better not show up. It was just not done, and in very few offices did that happen.

There were a lot of powerful staff members around here, but again they knew who they were working for and they respected that. And it was smaller. It was easier to handle a smaller staff. Gee, I remember the Finance Committee when [Harry] Byrd was chairman, way back in those days. Christ, I think they only had seven staff men, including a chief economist and all that, writing tax legislation and dealing with House Ways and Means, maybe they had a few more, but not many. And there weren't that many on the Senate Appropriations Committee when I first got back here, I think maybe twenty-five or something like that. It was very small. So it was easier for a member to keep track. One of the things I thought I'd never see compared to when I left Capitol Hill as a staff member, after running my two times and Carl Hayden's retirement, I never thought I'd live to see the day that there was a bureaucracy on Capitol Hill. It just boggles my mind that staffs are about four times what they were in 1969, 1970, in just twenty years time.

I never thought I'd live to see the day that would develop. Some of it I'm sure has been good, but for the most part I'm not sure that members are being better served than they were back then. A lot of professionalism was coming along, particularly after World War II around here on staffs, but everyone who came here, just like the way I arrived, it was all politics. It was all political patronage. And I used to get mad at the people on the Appropriations Committee staff over there, because the senator turned them into professionals and they forgot how they got here sometimes. You know, when you were trying to get them to do something that was political, or more political than they thought was the professionalism, you had to remind them sometimes that they came there the same way you did. And of course the committee staffs for the most part were a lot different than a senator's staff. You got all the heat in the senator's personal office. You had to respond to the political realities at home, and also try to

get the work done, and also work with the committee and committee staffs. For the most part we had very good arrangements, and got along pretty well in most every area. But—[laughs]

RITCHIE: There's a story you're thinking but not telling.

ELSON: Yeah.

RITCHIE: Well, I have a lot of questions about Hayden and Lyndon Johnson, but maybe this might be a good point to stop.

ELSON: Yeah, I think so, I'd better go back to work.

RITCHIE: Because if we start now I don't want to have to cut you off in the middle.

ELSON: Well, that whole history of Lyndon, going from his becoming minority leader and all the way through his presidency, they were very close. The old man had great respect for his abilities and his talents, particularly when he was leader.

RITCHIE: That's the period that I'm definitely interested in talking to you about. Well, thank you again.

End of Interview #2